Frank Stephens
Field Notes, 1926

March 15 - December 30, 1926

San Diego Natural History Museum

Box 177

March 15 1926

Left my ranch yesterday morning and drove to San Felipe Narrows by noon and camped. Put out 13 gopher traps above the Narrows and five below, also 50 mouse traps at the foot of the rocky hills around camp. This morning I had one Perognathus vumicus and the tail of another — and one Thomomys fs. albatus. Very poor catch, the worst I ever had here. Two gopher traps were filled, not spring, and one mouse trap was springing and the bait taken from another. These mouse traps are too large for ordinary mice. They get so far inside the spring that only the tail gets caught and they pull it in two and get away.

The narrow valley between the "Yaqui" Well and the Narrows (6 miles) is 1/2 to 1 1/2 miles wide, — sandy, stony, with scattered desert shrubs. The Narrows is 1/4 mile long, about 200 yards wide, with steep rocky cliffs on each side. Below the Narrows the mountains continue to the right (east) for a dozen miles or more. To the left is a mesa, continuing to Borego Valley, 8 or 10 miles, — this region really being a part of the Colorado Desert.

Last year I caught two ~~dark~~ dark gophers above the Narrows and several light albatus below. The T. fs. albatus was caught this morning a mile or more above the Narrows and within a few yards of where I caught one of the dark colored gophers last year. She contained six small embryos.

March 16 1926

This morning the gopher traps contained two Thomomys r. fossatus, One was caught 1/4 mile above the Narrows, the other 1/4 mile further up, both being below where I got the T. p. albatus; therefore the two species overlap here.

The Perognathus fasciatus bangsi (?) was caught at the foot of the steep, rocky hillside below the Narrows. The type of P. f. arenicola was taken here, If several specimens could be taken I believe the subspecies could be restored from synonomy,

Harpers Well, Imperial Co. Mch 17 1926
Drove down here yesterday forenoon, the road is very bad, rocky with many chuck holes, Had to go out low oftn, was 3½ hours driving 25 miles, Put out 7 gopher traps in the afternoon, This morning I had one albatus and it was red with little ants when found, Last evening I trapped three Neotoma a. vernsta near the camp fire before going to bed, All were females, One contained two fœtuses the other one, There is very little mammal sign here too dry a desert, There are small salt streams in the barancas, and occasional ~~fresh~~ patches of Juncus, in which the few gophers make their burrows, There are no gopher signs on the level ground, Put out more gopher traps this morning, and tonight I got four gophers, Have 16 traps out now, Haven't seen a dozen birds here yet.
Saw an old fox track near the creek and tonight I put out a set of traps, Small hope of getting any, Thermometer yesterday 87°, cooler today, cloudy.

March 19 1928

Fish Spring, Imperial Co, Cal,

This not Fish Creek, Harpers Well is on the bank of Fish Creek. This spring is within a mile or so of the north line of Imperial County. It is 1/4 mile from the shore of Salton Lake. From the springs to the lake is a patch of tulles. The soil around here is very alkaline. There are numerous small screw bean trees and a very few small willows. Higher, toward the mountains are palo-verde trees and other desert shrubs.

We drove from Harpers Well this forenoon, 29 miles. Passed Kane Spring. It looked so poor a trapping ground that I did not make a station there, besides it is only five miles from Harpers Well.

I have put out ten gopher traps, in wet, alkaline, salt grass ground, saw no gopher sign elsewhere, — yet at least. Can find no meadow-mice runs in the tulles. This was all submerged when Salton Lake was at its highest stage several years ago and probably Microtus and Reithrodontomys have not been re-established. Prospects for other mice are poor on account of alkali.

Bought two gophers

March 21 1926

In the afternoon drove to Coachella and then southwest 2½ miles to Mr. Wilsons, Had trouble on the way with stoppage of the gasoline supply pipe, Took an hour or more to find the trouble and remedy it, Got to Wilsons at 5 P.M. Made camp and put out a few traps, This morning I had one Neotoma and one Perognathus fasciatus and the tail of another, Wilson says there are a very few gophers in his alfalfa; apparently none outside, We could find but one mound, I set a trap, but suspect it is a Dipodomys, Neotoma are plentiful in the mesquit clumps in the adjoining uncleared land, Wilson does not know of any foxes in the neighborhood

This is about the middle of the valley, The soil is sandy, Small bunches of perennial plants are abundant, and the mesquit clumps are common, I set several traps this morning at burrows that looked like those of Citellus, but may be of Dipodomys, Perognathus fasciatus is probably common, but it is doubtful if any other species of Perognathus occurs here, with the possible exception of bangsi.

March 23rd 1926

Drove to Palm Spring. Had difficulty to find a camping place, but finally camped in the public camp ground on the Indian Reservation. Did not get any traps out. This morning I went out east a mile or so to set traps, but put out none yet. There are a few very old gopher burrows near the water, but I could find none elsewhere. Nearly all the gopher mounds have been dug into, apparently by dogs. This place is ruined for collecting. There is quite a town here now, and a large floating population of Mexicans, as well as quite a number of Indians. This is a slack season for work for Mexicans and there are many Mexican families camped here.

In this mornings tramp I watched for tracks in the sandy road. No travel in it since yesterday. I saw a number of jack-rabbit and cottontail tracks, one Citellus and three mice tracks, apparently Peromyscus. I'll try again this afternoon.

It looks as if there had been no rain in this part of the Desert since the early part of the winter. All the short lived vegetation is dried and withered. Birds are very scarce. It is about as poor a collecting season as I ever saw here, and I have been here many times.

Toward night I put out 40 mouse traps in the lower part of Tahquitz Canon, just below the falls and 2 miles from camp, Rocky canon.

24th. In the mouse traps I had two Peromyscus vemicus and the tail of a Perognathus penicillatus. I am disgusted with Palms Springs as a collecting locality.

March 25 1926

yesterday afternoon I drove to the Whitewater ranch at the lower end of the San Gorgonio Pass, This is the old Whitewater stage station, The railroad station of Whitewater is a mile or more further down the Pass, There is a "service station" here, with free camp ground sheltered by trees along the ditch, It is 12 miles from Palm Springs, alt. about 1350, The wind is blowing hard here, as usual, It sucks down thru the Pass to the Desert. Clouds are coming down into the Pass, but melt before they get here, I suspect it is raining "inside", This is the type locality of Dipodomys similis (?) Rhoads, now considered synonymous with similis.

Put out a few gopher traps and 25 mouse traps; this morning I had three gophers, one Dipodomys, and a Peromyscus that looks somewhat like P. b. truei, also two Perognathus tails, probably penicillatus, There is a small flock of Zonotrichia leucophrys here that may be wintering, as it is too early for this subspecies to be migrating, Two were caught in mouse traps,

March 27 1926

This afternoon I caught a Leiotilus t. chloris, the only one seen here yet, Have seen no ~~at~~ Ammospermophilus, nor any Le Conte thrashers, though I need to get them here, Caught two Reithrodontomys in salt grass in the orchard

March 27 1926.

I haven't seen a bat, or a "horned toad", nor a snake of any kind. It is by far the poorest collecting season I have seen here. We are having the usual strong west winds here in the Pass. The Pass is about two miles wide, a regular desert except where the few irrigating ditches keep vegetation green. The creosote bushes are stunted, as are also the plentiful "cholla" cactuses, — two or three species. There are some Cereus and Echinocactus cactuses, and a few Yucca baccata. There are a few lizards of the small, common species, but I have seen none of the larger species that should be rather common. Lonotrichia appear to be more common today. My mouse traps have taken six so far, I saved but one, all were leucophrys. The gophers are mostly patchy, with more or less of the winter pelage on the rump. Evidently there are two species here.

The Dipodomys (1643) puzzles me. With nothing but memory to go by I can't place it. It is probably panamint, but if so it is out of its known range, and what are two sub-species of D. merriami doing here together?

March 30 1926

We are camped about two miles south of Cabezon, at the foot of the "Hall Grade". This is about ten miles from our last camp. It is a fairly good collecting ground. Sceloporus are common, probably two species. Perognathus m. conscriensis are abundant on the valley land, and I got one P. e. insignis on the step, brushy mountain side, also one Reithrodontomys in brush a little ways up the hillside. I took one Dipodomys a. cabezonae last night, in the valley land. I see but little sign of their presence here, but am trying for them tonight. I took one Microtus today in a springy piece of grass and Juncus. This afternoon I caught a Citellus t. fisheri, the only one seen on the trip yet. Got one Perognathus p. bangsi last night. I am coming to believe that P. p. arenicola will be restored to good standing in time if more specimens can be found. A Neotoma caught last night had lost nearly half its tail. It is too large for gilva and may possibly be venusta. It was caught under a mesquit. I did not know venusta came this far west.

We are told that Lamb and another man from the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology camped here a few days ago. I can see but few signs of their trapping here.

The wind has been strong all day and it is uncomfortably cold. I'll be glad to get away from San Gorgonio Pass.

31st. Caught 4 Perognathus fallax here. But one was fit to skin.

April 2nd 1926

Threatening, stormy weather soon of the 31st, so we moved, Light rain from Cabazon to Redlands, Cold, Stopped at my brothers place in Riverside. Put out traps for gophers yesterday and caught several, - three big ones, Rained a little yesterday and today, Shall stay here until the weather gets better, Have lost several gopher traps here, cats or dogs pull them out and carry them off, probably for the gophers in them,

Lost 8 traps here,

April 8 1926

Still showery, The old house we are camping in hasn't a door or window left, There are four rooms so when the rain blows in we shift to some room to the leeward, There is a small cellar under the house and we make a fire there for cooking when the rain falls. It is not comfortable, but it beats a tent when the wind blows, as it does most of the time, As I took up my traps yesterday I hadn't much to skin today, I have put out a few gopher traps, and so far have caught one today There are quite a number of old pepper trees around the house and about five acres here has not been plowed for several years, The gophers have concentrated here, but we have nearly cleaned them out, I have five and Jack has three,

The mouse traps set here have caught only Peromyscus m. gambeli so far, They are abundant.

April 4 1926

Yesterday we drove thru Paris to about two miles east of Ethanac, on the Winchester road. As rain threatened we camped at a vacant house, as near as I can remember the locality (which is much changed in appearance by cultivation) the place where I caught the type specimen of Dipodomys stephensi is about a mile southeast of here, at the base of low mountains.

Yesterday I bought a dozen wooden rat traps in Riverside. In the afternoon I put them out where I believe I got the D. stephensi. This morning all I got from them was one D. agilis, with its head eaten by squirrels, which are abundant here.

Jack joined us at Riverside. Yesterday he put out some traps in brushy land a mile or more northeast of camp. This morning he had several Dipodomys, one being parvus, which he gave me. If not too wet I'll put out traps this afternoon when Jack had his last night.

All the level land in this region is cultivated, some orchards, but mostly grain.

April 7 1926

I put out 55 traps the afternoon of the 4th, where Jack caught the D. parvus. Next morning I had in the traps 5 Dipodomys agilis, several Peromyscus m. gambeli and a white-crowned sparrow. Rain fell most of the day and I got a soaking going to the traps. That night it rained hard and I found most of my traps sprung, with but one Peromyscus and four white-crowned sparrows in them. Apparently the heavy rain drops sprung many traps. This morning rain is falling, and I am waiting for the weather to clear enough to let me get to my traps without getting a wetting. So far there has been four inches of rain, with more in prospect. My traps are a mile and a half away, in a patch of an acre or so of brushy land on a rocky knoll, surrounded by cultivated land.

There is a brood of young strikes in an old pump house near here.

April 11 1926

On the afternoon of the 9th, we camped on the summit of the Temecula grade, a mile or more from the line between Riverside and San Diego counties, alt. about 1200'. The place is thick chaparral with some scrub oaks, etc, with many granite boulders on the mountain sides. Caught two Dipodomys a. simulans. A mile or two northeast, ~~at~~ perhaps 300' or 400 feet lower altitude, D. agilis are probably common in the open plain, but in the opposite direction D. a. simulans probably occurs nearly or quite to the sea. It would be interesting to get comparable material from similar ground and altitudes on the two sides of the mountains.

Drove home the afternoon of the 10th. As the roads were in bad condition from the heavy rains I thought best not to try to go via Warners, but stuck to the paved road.

July - 1926

I left San Diego the morning of July 2nd, and drove to near the northeast foot of Temecula grade and camped. Son Hester is with me, I wanted to see how near Dipodomys agilis agilis and D. a. simulans come together. I had Son put out traps in the brush on the hillsides near camp and put mine out in the wash of the creek bottom at the edge of the plain, between grain fields, I saw very little sign of pocket rats.

The morning of the 3rd, all I had in 20 traps was the tail of a Perognathus. Son had one adult and two young Dipodomys. In the forenoon we drove to Aguanga, and put out traps in the afternoon.

Aguanga Valley is mostly Temecula River bottom land. The valley is about two miles long and half a mile to a mile and a half wide. The soil is loam, mostly a light sandy loam. Much of the vegetation is Artemesia ("sage brush"). There are some mesquit bushes and also what the desert people call "desert willow", a shrub with a trumpet shaped blossom. The hillsides have a mixed growth of arid region shrubs and chaparral, with the chaparral more abundant on the granite ridges. In places cactuses are abundant, mostly "tuna" (Opuntia). I put out traps in one cactus patch of an acre or more and took over twenty Hedoma intermedia.

There was lots of rat and mice signs in the bottom land and abundant rabbit tracks. The bait was taken from our traps every night and many spring, but the catch was good. We lost eight traps here, carried off by rats and [redacted] rabbits. We left Aguanga noon of the 7th.

In the afternoon of July 7th we stopped at three places between Aquanga and Warners and looked through the brush for Tiwo vicinior but without seeing or hearing any.

La Puerta Valley, San Diego Co Cal
August 21 1926

I have been baiting steel traps with pieces of melon, Almost every morning I get a rabbit, mostly Sylvilagus. Sometimes in the day time I get a Lestelthus lineticaudus. They spoil very quickly, if I don't get them soon, I usually visit such traps three times a day. Today at noon I found an immature Scott Oriole in one of the steel traps. It was dead, but still held bits of melon pulp in its bill. The Scott Orioles are bad on grapes. They are the most common species now. I often flush 3 or 4, sometimes half a dozen, from the grape vines. Occasionally there are bullocki and euenullatus nelsoni. The Vireos

second in abundance. They are persistent grape eaters. Early in the season Black-headed Grosbeaks were most abundant but they are mostly gone now. The birds got fully half of the grapes this fall.

Yesterday I put out traps in some sand dunes on Trelfords place. This morning I had one Dipsochorus deserti. The "pinacate" beetles clean up the rolled out bait in the daytime. At 5 o'clock this afternoon I rebailed the traps. In one trap I found a ♂ D. deserti so thoroughly cooked in the sun that it broke in two in handling. It must have been caught some time in the forenoon. I don't recall another instance of their feeding in the daytime.

La Puerta Valley, Cal.
Sept 3 1926

In making the round of my traps this morning in one trap I found a Dipodomys merriami similus and a Perognathus penicillatus. I do not remember ever before taking animals of two different genera in the same trap at the same time. They laid side by side with their heads close to the trigger. They were numbers 1898 and 1899.

Sept 9 1926

Caught an Onychomys torridus this morning, but it was so badly eaten by ants that it could not be stored. It is the second I know of for the valley

Dulzura, San Diego Co. Cal.

Sept. 14 to 18, inc. 1926

Camped just across the creek from Schecklers house. The barometer registered 1400 feet alt. The gate across the road to the old Marsh place was locked. There was no water in the creek as it had been shut off at the Barrett dam some time.

After the first night I put out part of the traps about 3/4 of a mile further up the road (south) around a barley field. The barometer made it about 200 feet higher. I kept the catch of the two places separate and the altitude given on the labels will identify them.

The old Marsh place, where Marshes traps were taken is about two miles south or south west of my camp.

A Microtus found drowned in the spring was to far gone to save.

I kept the water trap out, but from some reason caught nothing in it.

Dec 25 1926

We come to La Puerta the 18th. On the 20th, we drove down to Carrizo Creek. The recent rains had washed the roads some but not badly, until we got to the main creek, (Carrizo) We went down the creek bed about four miles, ~~the~~ There had been a flood in the main creek, but we got along all right until the road left the creek bed, from there on the flood had washed the banks badly. Where the road left the creek the perpendicular banks were 15 to 20 feet high. Some one had very recently shoveled a passage down at the old road, but it was so steep that we could not pull up it. We went a quarter of a mile further down and found a place where we got up the bank, but could get no further on account of the sand, so we camped there, about a mile above the old stage station. We found this a good collecting ground. The second night was stormy with misty rain. At noon the ~~2~~ fourth day there the weather looked very threatening so we loaded up and turned back. We had trouble getting up the hill from Vallecito Valley in the rain which was turning to snow. Yesterday morning there was an inch of snow around the cabin, but it has melted today except behind bushes. The days are short and cold and more or less stormy, so trapping is not very good.

Dec 30 1926

Since Christmas the nights have been cold. Thermometer at Simonie has registered 24° to 28°, Ground frozen in the morning.

The others have been hearing Lecontes thrashers occasionally and have seen two or three, but they were very wild. Today we all put in most of the day hunting for Lecontes thrashers. Jack saw one and thinks he wounded it but he failed to find. No one else saw any. Sam killed a Black-throated sparrow and gave it to me. I'll freeze it tonight and take it in in the flesh. He saw others. We intend driving to the San Felipe Creek tomorrow afternoon, and to San Diego the next day.

San Diego Natural History Museum